



Dear Friends,

More than 21 million American children and teenagers are using the Internet, and the number increases dramatically every day.

Practically overnight, a whole new world has been opened to your children. Information is readily available with research that can be done on a home computer instead of at the library with books. The online world offers children experiences that are both educational and rewarding – especially with new and exciting games. Becoming computer literate is essential these days, and maximizes future career potential.

Unfortunately, this exciting medium for education and entertainment can endanger our children emotionally – and even physically. We all have been saddened by stories of teenagers and young children being lured by violent predators into meetings, often with tragic consequences.

As a parent, you want to keep your child's experience online a positive and safe adventure. To help you keep your child safe online, this brochure provides an overview of the risks to children and tools available for parents. This is not a comprehensive guide, but instead offers guidance and suggestions. The Internet can be a grand adventure ... as long as our children remain safe.

Sincerely,

Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee 33rd Assembly District





Parental control tools

There are three primary places where parents can obtain parental control tools with the features described in this brochure:

Your Internet Service Provider (ISP)

The best place to start is with the company that provides you with a connection to the Internet, such as America Online or Yahoo. Most offer a range of control features, often for free.

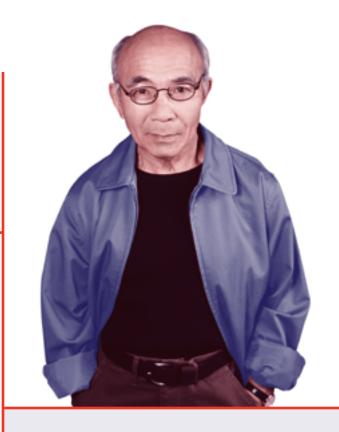
Your local computer or retail store

Consider purchasing "blocking and filtering" software to stop objectionable material before it reaches your kids. You have to set up these products on your own computer.

Your web browser

You can also use certain web browsers, such as Microsoft Internet Explorer, to enforce parental control rating systems.

Keep an eye on other parental control tools, such as "safe areas" for kids, new types of rating systems, and search engines designed to find family-friendly information only.



Additional resources

There are many outstanding resources parents can use to investigate web sites and to protect children from online predators and scams. Here are just a few:

The Children's Partnership www.childrenspartnership.org 1351 3rd Street Promenade, Suite 206 Santa Monica, CA, 90401 • (310) 260-1220

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children www.ncmec.org 699 Prince St. • Alexandria, VA 22314 (703) 274-3900 • (800) THE-LOST

www.safekids.com

www.safeteens.com





Stay informed

Keep yourself informed about the parental control tools that can help you keep your child safe online. This brochure includes an introduction to what is currently available and what Internet tools can and cannot do.

Become an advocate for children

If you see materials or practices you do not like, contact your Internet Service Provider (the company that provides you with a connection to the Internet) or the company that created the material. Take advantage of this unique opportunity to make sure this growing medium develops in positive ways for your child.

Establish rules for your children

Establish a list of Internet rules for your children. Stick with them. If your child breaks the rules, enact an agreed-upon punishment, such as no online activities for a week.

Learn about the Internet

If you are just starting out, see what your local library, community center, school or newspaper offers by way of introduction.

Get involved

Spend time online with your child, whether at home, at the library, or at a computer center in your community. Your involvement in your child's life, including his or her online life, is the best insurance of your child's safety.





E-mail and chat rooms

With e-mail, your child can send and receive electronic messages from teachers, family and friends. E-mail can be a positive experience to help with homework, to practice writing, and to keep in touch with long-distance friends and family. However, e-mail also can be a potential hazard.

Spam (unsolicited e-mail) often contain sites with sexually explicit material, products for sale, or moneymaking schemes. People can be harassed through e-mail, or your child may be communicating with a stranger pretending to be someone else. Complain to the sender and your ISP about spam.

You should share your child's e-mail account and password. Talk to your child about people he or she is meeting online. Set a firm rule that your child NEVER arranges a meeting in person with anyone online.

In chat rooms, people can read messages as they are typed. Chat rooms can be just two people or lots of people, and can be fun especially when children can "talk" to people with similar interests, such as books, sports and movies. Unfortunately, chat rooms are the most common place for predators to prey on our kids, pretending to be children themselves and attempting to lure kids into public meetings, or exposing them to pornographic material.

The single most important rule to teach children is to NEVER give out any personal information including their name, address, phone number, school name or address, or anything else that can identify them (such as their parents' names). Visit chat rooms with your child, or check out a chat room in advance before allowing your child to enter. Consider blocking some chat rooms completely. Teach your child that people are not always who they say they are.

With both e-mail and chat rooms, hands-on parental involvement and interest is essential in keeping kids safe.



Risks to your children

Gambling

Most online gambling sites require a person to use a credit card or write a check to transfer funds, but there are sites that allow people to gamble just "for fun." In some cases, these sites may be operating legally in the jurisdiction where they are physically located, but it is generally illegal for minors to gamble regardless of where they are.

Exposure to inappropriate material

A great risk is that your child may be exposed to inappropriate material that is sexual, hateful, violent in nature or encourages activities that are dangerous or illegal. Your child also might encounter e-mail, chat or bulletin board messages that are harassing, demeaning or belligerent.

Physical molestation

There is a chance that, while online, your child could provide information or could arrange an encounter that could risk his or her safety or the safety of other family members. In a few cases, pedophiles have used e-mail, bulletin boards and chat areas to arrange face-to-face meetings with children.

Legal and financial

There is also the risk that your child could do something that has negative legal or financial consequences, such as giving out your credit card number, or doing something that violates another person's rights.

Alcohol, tobacco and firearms

Some web sites and news groups contain information that advocates the use of drugs, tobacco or alcohol. It's even possible to find places on the Internet where you can learn to make bombs or obtain weapons.





Kids' rules for online safety

- 1.1 will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parents' work address/ telephone number, or the name and location of my school without my parents' permission.
- 2. I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.
- 3.1 will never agree to get together with someone 1 "meet" online without first checking with my parents. If they agree to the meeting, I will be sure that it is in a public place and I will bring a parent.
- **4.** I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents.

- **5.** I will not respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. It is not my fault if I get a message like that. If I do, I will tell my parents right away so they can contact the service provider.
- 6. I will talk with my parents so we can set up rules for going online. We will decide upon the time of day that I can be online, the length of time I can be online, and appropriate areas for me to visit. I will not access other areas or break these rules.
- 7. I will not give out my Internet password to anyone other than my parents (even my best friends).
- **8.** I will be a good online citizen and will not do anything that is hurtful to other people or is against the law.

Rules one through six are adapted from the brochure Child Safety on the Information Highway, by SafeKids.Com founder Lawrence J. Magid

This brochure is presented by Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee



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